New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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1950 PRODUCTIONS

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1950 PRODUCTIONS

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 6, 1950*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Arms and the Girl"

Daily Mirror
February 3, 1950

'Arms and the Girl' Gay And Charming Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

A smart first-night audience embraced affectionately "Arms and the Girl" at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre last evening. This is the delightful new musical fashioned by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, Rouben Mamoulian and Morton Gould from Lawrence Langner and Armina Marshall's play, "The Pursuit of Happiness."

The Theatre Guild in association with Anthony Brady Farrell have given the new arrival a slick, click production. Michael Kidd, a graduate of the Mirror's city room, has contrived sprightly dances to complement Mamoulian's glossy staging of the book. Horace Armistead and Audre have designed easy-on-the-eyes settings and costumes.

The cast is super-duper. Gorgeous Nanette Fabray sparkles as the patriotic tomboy with the vivid imagination, who almost wrecked Gen. George Washington's New England campaign by blowing up bridges and delaying handsome young officers — via the bundling bed—whom she suspected of being spies.

Bundling, incidentally, was New England's answer in Colonial days to fuel shortages. Courtships were conducted in bed under quilts, with a formidable saw-tooth board separating the participants. We shouldn't be surprised to see Lewis and Conger revive these useful gadgets if John L. Lewis remains adamant much longer.

Georges Guetary, who came to us from Greece by way of Paris, should prove the matinee idol find of the current season. He acts and sings the role of the liberty-loving young Hessian officer, who deserts the British army and wins an American wife, with ingratiating verve.

Pearl Bailey also is terrific as a runaway slave. Her nonchalant song delivery and flair for deadpan comedy proved show-stoppers. John Conte is excellent as the hapless Virginia colonel harassed by the suspicions of the heroine. Salutes, too, are due Florenz Ames, Arthur Vinton, Eda Heinemann, Seth Arnold and William P. McCarthy.

Gould, with an assist from Philip J. Lang, has done lively orchestrations of his score. He is one of the few present-day composers who is also a master arranger. Several of the numbers loom as Hit Parade candidates.

"Arms and the Girl" is a welcome addition to our roster of musical hits. It has bounce, gaiety and charm. It belongs on your "must see" list, but don't wait too long to buy your tickets. They're going to be hard to come by.

"ARMS AND THE GIRL"

A musical with book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields and Rouben Mamoulian; based on the play "The Pursuit of Happiness" by Lawrence Langner and Armina Marshall; lyrics by Miss Fields; music by Morton Gould; staged by Mr. Mamoulian; dances by Michael Kidd; scenery by Horace Armistead; costumes by Audre; musical conductor, Frederick Dvonch; orchestrations by Mr. Gould, Philip J. Lang and Allan Small; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; presented by the Theatre Guild in association with Anthony Brady Farrell at the 46th Street Theatre, February 2, 1950. The cast:

Connecticut.....Pearl Bailey
Franz.....Georges Guetary
Jo Kirkland....Nanette Fabray
Thad Jennings.....Seth Arnold
Two Sons of Liberty.....
Andrew Apres and Victor Young
Town Crier..William J. McCarthy
Capt. Aaron Kirkland.....
Florenz Ames
Drummer.....Jerry Miller
Sergeant.....Norman Weise
Prudence Kirkland.....
Eda Heinemann
Comfort Kirkland.....
Lula Belle Clarke
Ben.....Sterling Hall
Matthew.....Joseph Caruso
A Militiaman.....Peter Miceli
Abigail.....Mimi Cabanne
Betsy.....Joan Keenan
Col. Mortimer Sherwood...
John Conte
Aides to General Curtis....
Daniel O'Brien and Robert Rippy
General Lucius Curtis.....
Cliff Dunstan
John.....Paul Fitzpatrick
David.....Philip Rodd
General George Washington..
Arthur Vinton

Journal American
February 3, 1950

Less in Musical-Play Than There Should Be

By ROBERT GARLAND

They, the well-known co-workers on "Arms and the Girl," have not done right by the Alan Child-Isabelle Louden (Lawrence Langner-Armina Marshall) "Pursuit of Happiness" on which it is, in a manner of writing, founded. There is a better musical-play in the seventeen-year-old comedy of bundling than the one The Theatre Guild and Anthony Farrell have put on display at the 46th Street.

Do not confuse this new "Arms and the Girl" with the old "Arms and the Girl" by Grant Stewart and Robert Baker and produced by William Harris at the Fulton in 1916 with Cyril Scott and Fay Bainter. This new "Arms and the Girl" is, I am assured, the direct descendant of "The Pursuit of Happiness" as noted, although there are times when you or "The Pursuit of Happiness" would not suspect it.

As for "The Pursuit of Happiness," that was put on by Laurence Rivers at the Avon in 1933. Written publicly in secret by Mr. Langner and Miss Marshall under the names of Mr. Child and Miss Louden, the Prudence Kirkland who now is Jo was played by Peggy Conklin, the George Guetary who now is Franz was played by Tonie Selwart and the memorable Meg of Dennie Moore is written out . . .

To make up for her, a colored character called Connecticut is written in!

* * *

Because of the substitution "Arms and the Girl" is a brighter show than it might be without her. To make up for the missing Meg and her far famed curtain line, this colored character called Connecticut is a runaway slave with a mouth full of songs who takes what would be her given name from whatever State of the Union she happens, at the moment, to be escaping through.

She is, for reasons of her impersonator's rather than her own, the most alive and ticking character in a not generally alive and ticking libretto. Having turned their backs on "The Pursuit of Happiness" as a comedy of bundling, Herbert and Dorothy Fields, plus the directing Rouben Mamoulian, as librettists, have turned their faces on a melodramatic farce of the American Revolution.

The Prudence of "The Pursuit of Happiness" is now a Jo of "Arms and the Girl" who is a goofy New England Joan of Arc. Deciding to win the war and rout the British all by herself, she almost succeeds in routing the war and winning the British instead. If George Washington and his horse should fail to intervene, American Revolutionary history would be rewritten on-stage at the 46th Street . . .

* * *

Pearl Bailey, as the written-in colored character called Connecticut, the runaway slave with hair immaculate and gowns by Audre, dominates "Arms and the Girl." Although you do not believe her member of the libretto any more than you believe the others, she, more than they, gets away with it. Her songs, especially "Plantation in Philadelphia," stand out because of her projection.

Nanette Fabray, in trousers, skirts and neither, works and works at being the piece's would-be St. Jo of Ridgefield. But, I am afraid, the part resists her. Georges Guetary, a more successful French import than the Guild's Jean Pierre Aumont of last season, has looks, charm, ability and voice as the Hessian who now is Franz. He can even make love while standing up in bed.

The others are more or less routine, as are the direction, the dances, the costumes, the scenery and the music. Every musical play, I know, must have a song hit. On 46th Street you are at liberty to choose between "A Cow and a Plough and a Frau," sung by Mr. Guetary, and any of Miss Bailey's because Miss Bailey sings them. "There Must Be Something Better Than Love," for instance . . .

Following the trend of "Oklahoma," The Guild's new musical-play might well be called "Connecticut," in honor of Pearl Bailey.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
February 3, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Spectacular Production

THE Theater Guild has mounted a lavish and colorful musical show at the Forty-sixth Street Theater. "Arms and the Girl" is that pleasant comedy of Revolutionary days, "The Pursuit of Happiness," with song and dance embellishments. It has the artful Nanette Fabray and a brilliant newcomer to Broadway from France, Georges Guetary, in starring roles, and the inimitable Pearl Bailey chanting ditties which have little or no relation to the main theme. Under the direction of Rouben Mamoulian, who collaborated with Herbert and Dorothy Fields on the libretto, it is a beautiful, if somewhat ponderous entertainment.

* * *

The chief drawback of a spectacular production is the indecision of all concerned whether to concentrate on the drama, which involves a Hessian deserter with a self-appointed American Joan of Arc, or on the musical festivities. Morton Gould has written an engaging score for the work and Michael Kidd has put some nimble dancers through their paces on one or two occasions, but the book is wordy, repetitious and poorly paced. It has a rousing climax when George Washington rides into the town square of Ridgefield, Conn., on a white charger to chide an over-zealous patriot, but much of the material, including the fine bundling scenes of the original play has a tendency to become dull.

* * *

The performances could hardly have been bettered. Miss Fabray is wonderfully winning as the lass who dons pants and a sword and suspects every one of being a British spy. Whether she is singing such tunes as "That's My Fella," "You Kissed Me," or "I'll Never Learn," or doing a strip-tease to prepare for a johnnycake party, she brings zest and amusing accents to the proceedings. Guetary is an ideal leading man for her period antics as the Hessian in pursuit of happiness. He can act as well as sing. In "I Like It Here," "A Cow and a Plough and a Frau," or "She's Exciting," he has remarkable vocal authority. When he is learning about the custom of bundling, he is an accomplished comedian.

Stringent pruning would have helped "Arms and the Girl" in sustaining its general gaiety. Some of the scenes look as though the authors had had trouble in getting their characters off-stage. And one in which Miss Bailey croons "There Must Be Something Better Than Love" is oddly out of character, although the song is fetching. The dancers do their high kicks in "That's My Fella" and "Plantation in Philadelphia." They might have had more to do in a show which is top-heavy with plot. Horace Armistead has designed handsome settings for a period musical and Audre has whipped up striking costumes for the offering. And John Conte, Florenz Almes and Eda Heinemann are excellent in some of the lesser roles. "Arms and the Girl" is a lot of show, but it is rather surfeiting.

The New York Times
February 3, 1950

'Arms and the Girl,' a Musical Show About Colonial Times, Put On by Theatre Guild

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By putting their heads together under the roof of the Theatre Guild, some of our ablest bigwigs have come up with a conventional operetta. "Arms and the Girl," which was put on at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre last evening, is a story of the American Revolution, done to music. In the last scene Gen. George Washington makes an imposing entrance on a white horse.

The story derives from a pleasant comedy, "The Pursuit of Happiness," which Lawrence Langner and Armina Marshall wrote some years ago in honor of the New England custom of "bundling." The big scene in "Arms and the Girl" shows a patriotic American lady bundling first with one gentleman and then another and making ingenuous remarks about going to bed that keep the audience in stitches.

* * *

Even when "The Pursuit of Happiness" was on the boards, the custom of bundling may not have been quite so piquant as Mr. and Mrs. Langner fondly imagined. In providing the musical version Herbert and Dorothy Fields and Rouben Mamoulian have fitted it into a spy-and-lover story that is not conspicuous for originality, skill or beauty. In craftsmanship and point of view it is closer to "The Student Prince" than they probably intended.

Some attractive people are wearing Colonial dress and Revolutionary uniforms in "Arms and the Girl." Nanette Fabray, a charming performer and a delightful singer, plays the latter-day Joan of Arc who is willing to bundle or blow up a bridge for her country. The part of her foreign-born suitor is played by Georges Guétary, who can act a character and sing a song with gusto, and make stage love in the continental style, which has obvious advantages.

* * *

As a slave escaped from Virginia, Pearl Bailey sings "There Must Be Something Better Than Love" with clowning exuberance and brings considerable useful strutting to the show. John Conte is affable and ingratiating as one of Gen. George Washington's most gallant officers.

Among the good people who have contributed to the pageantry and formalism are Morton Gould, composer; Michael Kidd, master of the ballet; Horace Armistead, designer of the scenery, and Audré, designer of the costumes. Mr. Gould's best songs are "I Like It Here," which is in an ambitious and rousing serenade style; "Nothin' for Nothin'," which Miss Bailey sings jauntily, and "Plantation in Philadelphia" and "That's My Fella," which are ballet tunes.

Having a number of beguiling young people on his hands, Mr. Kidd has set them joyously to dancing. Some of Mr. Armistead's scenery conveys an ideal relish of the beauties of Colonial landscapes in Connecticut; and Audré has made an appreciative use of Colonial costumes, in which we all have a sentimental proprietary interest.

But "Arms and the Girl" never really triumphs over the meager humor of the skittish joke on which it is founded. Nor has Mr. Mamoulian, director of "Lost in the Stars," transmuted the society of bundling into one of his wonder works. The American Revolution is a rich period for musical drama. Even when he is not riding a fat circus horse, George Washington is a grand figure that ought to stimulate writers and makers of music. But "Arms and the Girl" has settled down comfortably in the stereotypes of operetta, and is contented with making titillated snickers over one of the minor household customs of our practical ancestors.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
February 3, 1950

The Girl and the Revolution

By Richard Watts Jr.

"The Pursuit of Happiness," which was a pleasant little comedy about the American Revolution and the amiable old Colonial custom of bundling, has been given songs, dances, chorus numbers, soldiers, merry villagers, a lot more plot and General George Washington, and turned into a musical play called "Arms and the Girl." Presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre last night, it was revealed as a moderately frolicksome girl-and-music show, colorful and agreeable enough, but not very exciting.

The happiest features of the evening, I thought, were the American debut of a French romantic actor named Georges Guetary and the delightfully personal singing style of Pearl Bailey. Mr. Guetary sings brilliantly, acts with grace and humor, and reveals himself as a proper figure of a man for theatrical romance. As for the handsome Miss Bailey, who is far from unknown in these parts, she has never been more engagingly skillful, and her humorous brilliance made what I suspect are fairly ordinary songs seem witty and charming.

The Heroine

Nanette Fabray, who was so fine last season in the striking and underrated "Love Life," is less happily cast this year as an ambitious girl patriot, who strives with such outrageous zeal to defeat the British single-handed that General Washington has to appeal to her to desist. Miss Fabray has a nice sense of comedy and she is always a pleasant person to have around a musical show, but her part gets a little trying. The final important role, that of a Southern officer suspected by the heroine of being a spy, is pleasantly played by John Conte.

In "The Pursuit of Happiness," the girl of the story, as I recall it, was content to do her bundling with one man, the young Hessian soldier who was won over to the patriot cause by the words of the Declaration of Independence. Since, however, "Arms and the Girl" is a musical show, elaboration has been found necessary, and now she bundles with two men. Chiefly, though, the plot has been built up by transforming the heroine into a nitwit who goes about blowing up bridges and otherwise getting in the Revolution's way. It isn't very funny.

The Music

Despite the considerable help

given the songs by Miss Bailey and Mr. Guetary, the score by Morton Gould doesn't sound particularly interesting. The numbers I liked best were "Plantation in Philadelphia" and "There Must Be Something Better Than Love," and it was no coincidence that Pearl Bailey sang both of them. I feel, too, that the talented Dorothy Fields has, on the whole, contributed better lyrics on other occasions. Rouben Mamoulian's staging and Michael Kidd's choreography may be described as lively.

I should perhaps remind you that this is the report of one who found the tremendously successful "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" a great and resounding bore. I had a considerably less trying time at "Arms and the Girl." It is a show which is occasionally excellent and has nothing painful about it, save possibly the heroine's character. It is merely that, friendly and high-spirited as it is, the interest it arouses is, for most of the time, surprisingly mild.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 3, 1950

'Arms and the Girl' Close to Top Drawer

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

You can stash "Arms and the Girl" somewhere between the bottom of the top drawer and the top of the second. Among the best of the new musicals, it misses being real class of the ever memorable kind because of the corrugated aspect of its fun.

When it is good, it is rip roaring musical comedy. Such as when Nanette Fabray does a Colonial strip, or the new Georges Guetary holds a high note like nothing heard since Primi used to get such sounds out of tenors, or when Pearl Bailey just opens her mouth.

Between stuff like this and the pretty wonderful dances there are moments that just plain thud. Nobody expects a show to be brilliant every moment. The trouble here seems to be that the book has been pulled apart too often and stitched together like a rearranged patchwork quilt.

Also there is rarely a song lilting enough to win you in a single night.

A Damsel Named Jo.

But let's concentrate on the high points. This is a musical version of the popular comedy, "The Pursuit of Happiness." It relates the misadvantures of a fiery damsel named Jo, with the "Star-Spangled Banner" in her heart, who wants to win the Revolution. Her ambition is to catch a British spy, but all she does is harass the American Army and lose her heart to a deserting Hessian.

This is told with delightful bravura mechanics that smack of opry house days. In practice maneuvers, the soldiers literally rip a house apart. And when Jo determines to halt the enemy, she blows a bridge and the stream full of fish with it, all over the stage. There is a real snowstorm, and in the last scene George Washington rides in astride a snorting white horse.

Giving Their All.

The cast takes the show for what it is worth in being kidded to the hilt. Except for Pearl Bailey, who is wondrously relaxed and all the funnier for it, the performers give the impression that they grit their teeth and give their all, come what may.

Although it is the first time she is billed as such, most of us have considered Nanette Fabray a star for several seasons. Her sparkle is unique and her animation happy as her flaming patriot, Jo, blunders along in love and war. With no particularly charming music to sing, she puts across her lyrics, her restive moods, and her dance steps, in fine professional style.

A Happy Hessian.

Her co-star, Guetary, makes a happy debut as the Hessian hero. He has one of those indestructible voices that leave your ears ringing cheerily long after he has ended a high note. He also has that Continental gift for masking a libertine with boyish animation.

John Conte is a handsome and dashing Southern colonel, the chief butt of the heroine's flag-waving ingenuity. He acquits himself most pleasantly in "Don't Talk," one of the score's most melodic interludes.

As Connecticut, a deadpan and dizzy runaway slave, Pearl Bailey is a real honey. While she is singing "Nothin' for Nothin," or "There Must be Something Better Than Love," you may well decide they belong on the hit parade right now. When she ponders, "Joan of Arc? An upstate girl?" you may well split something rather important.

Dorothy Fields has done some of her best lyrics, than which none are better, and the book at large has wit superior to its sense of direction. Michael Kidd plotted some splendidly vigorous dances, and Horace Armistead designed a background of clear and frosty New England locations.

In the whole show nothing exceeds for pleasure the wild anti-geography of "Plantation in Philadelphia," designed to save Pearl Bailey from her incriminating juxtaposition of Va. and Pa.

DAILY NEWS

February 3, 1950

'Arms and the Girl' a Good Show, Thanks to Some Frisky Principals

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Theatre Guild's handsome new musical, "Arms and the Girl," which opened last evening at the 46th St. Theatre, has so many blessings that it should become a popular entertainment. Its blessings are the personalities who take part in it.

There is Nanette Fabray, playing a zealous young patriot of the American Revolution in the britches, boots and tricorn of a soldier. Miss Fabray is by all odds the liveliest of our musical comedy heroines. She is pretty, she is coquettish, and she can sing. She also can be a splendid knockabout clown, and the scene in which she captures a lover and attempts to catch a spy by luring them to her "bundling" bed is so fast and funny in its movement that it reminds me of an old Mack Sennett comedy.

There is Pearl Bailey, portraying an escaped slave. Miss Bailey used to be called Virginia because that was where she was; now that she is in Ridgefield, Fairfield County, she calls herself Connecticut. At one point, under questioning, she claims she is from Pennsylvania. When asked whereabouts, she shrugs, "I dunno. Some little town up there." Every time Miss Bailey puts foot on the stage for a comedy scene or a song she takes charge of the show and picks it right up.

Guetary Wins Welcome.

Another personality is a new one, a Parisian favorite of Greek birth named Georges Guetary. He plays a Hessian officer who has deserted to the American side—and music-show fans should be glad that he has deserted Europe for this side, for he is an engaging romantic lead with a good voice and some nice vocal tricks.

"Arms and the Girl" is based on the play, "The Pursuit of Happiness," by Lawrence Langner and Armina Marshall. You may remember this as a light, successful comedy about the Pennsylvania custom of bundling—in which, on cold nights, boy and girl get into bed to keep warm, and there's a low fence down the middle of the bed to preserve propriety.

Herbert and Dorothy Fields and Rouben Mamoulian have worked this up into a book in which Miss Fabray wrongly suspects an American officer of being a spy. To foil him, she not only bundles—she blows up bridges. She is finally persuaded by Gen. G. Washington himself to lay off, because she has become a hazard to the cause.

Bailey Songs Best.

The music is by Morton Gould. Some of it is in the sweet and fruity Gould style, but quite a bit has bounce. The audience gave Guetary a great welcome after his first song, "I Like It Here," and his "A Cow and a Plow and a Frau" is pleasant. My favorites are the ones lyrist Dorothy Fields provided for Miss Bailey—"Nothin' for Nothin'" and "There Must Be Something Better Than Love." (Concerning the latter number Miss Bailey queries, wide-eyed, that even if there is, who'd want it?)

The sets by Horace Armistead are just fine—and he keeps the stage bright and sunny. Did you ever stop to think how hard it is to see some of the shows in town, even after you've got the tickets and are in your seats?

There are some attractive dance numbers staged by Michael Kidd, and John Conte makes an admirable menace as the suspected spy who is invited to bundle with Fabray—even though the darn fool hesitates at first. Mr. Mamoulian has staged it with good style.

"The Innocents"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
February 2, 1950

The Case of the Haunted Children
By Richard Watts Jr.

Henry James' celebrated ghost story, "The Turn of the Screw," has been adapted for the stage by William Archibald with a sensitive feeling for its intangible terrors in an interesting play called "The Innocents," which opened at the Playhouse last night. Enormously aided by a brilliant production, with fine staging by Peter Glenville, a beautiful setting by Jo Mielziner and a cast which captures a difficult mood with exceptional skill, Mr. Archibald's dramatization of the famous tale of a Victorian haunted house makes for an arresting evening in the theatre.

"The Innocents" makes no compromise with the theory that James intended to suggest that the cruel phantoms of his novel were but figments of the unhappy heroine's diseased imagination. The ghosts of the butler and the governess that dominate the two sensitive children placed in the young woman's care are not part of poor Miss Giddens' tortured dreams but positively demonic spirits, even if their spell is a slightly cryptic one, and the evil they do certainly lives after them with eerie effectiveness.

The Spell

Obviously this is not every one's play. Its story is thin, its drama is based on atmosphere and suggestion rather than explicit deeds, and its whole spell may seem to many unpleasantly morbid instead of exhilaratingly haunting. I will grant that the intangible quality of its menacing doom can be a handicap as well as an advantage in the theatre. Nevertheless, it is my firm conviction that its vague, shadowy and slightly obscure horrors are far more frightening than the tangible ones of such an explicit melodrama as "The Man."

But, whatever one's feelings may be about the nameless dread of the narrative, there can be little doubt about the remarkable skill of the performance. For one thing, Beatrice Straight's frightened Miss Giddens is by far the finest work this oncoming actress has done in the theatre, a portrayal of intensity, delicacy and force, which maintains the difficult mood of the play with unflagging credibility. In the smaller role of the housekeeper, Isobel Elsom plays with her customary effectiveness.

The Children

It is, however, the two children who dominate the evening. This has been an astonishing season for child actors, and is likely to go a long way in destroying a bitter and understandable prejudice against them. In "The Innocents," a grave, sensitive, lovely girl of nine named Iris Mann and a handsome boy of 13 named David Cole portray the title characters, the children haunted by the evil spell of the dead butler, with such a combination of youthful charm and diabolical menace that they are at once touching and wonderfully sinister.

A false note in the production would have destroyed the delicate structure of the tale, but, under Mr. Glenville's understanding touch, the mood never falters.

"THE INNOCENTS"

Play by William Archibald; adapted from Henry James' story "The Turn of the Screw"; staged by Peter Glenville; scenery by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Motley; music by Alex North; presented by Peter Cookson at the Playhouse Theatre, February 1, 1950. The cast:

Flora.....Iris Mann
Mrs. Grose.....Isobel Elsom
Miss Giddens..Beatrice Straight
Miles.....David Cole
Also: Andrew Duggan and Ella Playwin.

Synopsis: The drawing-room of a country house in England, 1880. Act I. Scene 1. An early autumn afternoon. Scene 2. Three hours later. Scene 3. The following morning. Scene 4. Twilight. The same day. Scene 5. The following morning. Act II. Scene 1. Evening of the same day. Scene 2. The next morning. Scene 3. The same day. Twilight.

Mr. Mielziner's Victorian drawing-room is one of the season's loveliest settings, and the atmospheric music of Alex North is of decided help. "The Innocents" may be dramatic caviar, but, in taste, imagination and the capturing of a difficult mood, it is an achievement of a high order.

DAILY NEWS
February 2, 1950

'The Innocents' a Weird Thriller, Admirably Set, Staged and Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There are only four people—real ones, that is—in "The Innocents," which was presented last evening at the Playhouse. Two women, a 9-year-old girl and a 13-year-old boy.

They don't do much, in the sense of hustling around acting like actors and creating a disturbance. Most of what they do is talk—but as they talked last evening the most delicious and direful chill came upon me. Here was a play I liked and a production I admired.

"The Innocents" has been adapted by William Archibald from a Henry James novel, "The Turn of the Screw." It has the leisure and elegance of James' 19th Century time in England. It is a fine and delicate tale of indefinable horror, and it is tastefully and beautifully acted, directed, costumed and housed.

I suppose you should be warned that I have a weakness for the quieter frights of the English, or slow, type of psychological melodrama. I prefer stalking villians through paragraphs and chapters to chasing them around Eiffel Towers, Viennese and Parisian sewers, Radio City Music Halls and Statues of Liberty. I get short of breath with exercise and am happier taking it easy.

Two Baleful Children.

You, too, should curl up in a seat at the Playhouse, relax, and allow two weird and baleful children and two frightened women to curl your toes and cool your veins. It's refreshing—and there are no mad killers dashing around mussing things up. Somebody does die, to be sure, but there is no blood and nobody calls the police. Two very quiet, well behaved ghosts do the trick.

Beatrice Straight has come to a fine country house in England in 1880 to be governess for Iris Mann, a well-mannered, chatty lass of 9. When Miss Mann's brother, David Cole, gets bounced from school she is saddled with him, too. They are "done for" by Isobel Elsom, a housekeeper who keeps serving tea and looking distraught. There is nobody else—alive—in the house, which has 38 rooms, most of which have been closed off. The children are orphans; their uncle, who pays the bills, doesn't even want to hear about them in a letter.

Magnificent Setting.

These children are possessed and the house is haunted. Inexorably Miss Straight is transformed from a bright and cheery governess eager to please into an extremely frightened young woman. The four performances are splendid, and little Miss Mann and young Mr. Cole join the company of the many child actors who are taking over the stage this season.

Everything about "The Innocents" is in character and in the same fine style. Jo Mielziner has designed a magnificent drawing room—a really beautiful thing which, for all its beauty, can have a foreboding air of the supernatural as lamps and candles move about and the curtains of the great high window move almost imperceptibly in a ghostly breeze. The 1880 costumes by Motley are rich and wonderful—yet they, too, have something indefinably strange about them.

Peter Glenville has directed the play with the cool precision of a thoughtful chess-player. He never hurries anybody, for there is no place to go and not much, really, to be done. I'd trade two Hopalong Cassidy guns, a hydrogen bomb and an FBI badge for a couple of tickets to "The Innocents" any old time.

"The Innocents"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
February 2, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Has a Ghost of a Chance

HENRY JAMES'S tale of bewitched children, ghosts and a frightened governess, "The Turn of the Screw," has been given a baleful dramatic outline at the Playhouse. In "The Innocents," as William Archibald calls his adaptation, there are considerable alterations in the literary original, but the work retains an eery fascination. Most of this is due to a splendid portrait of Miss Giddens by Beatrice Straight, which inspires terror even when the action is obscure and lacks momentum. Isobel Elsom and two youngsters, Iris Mann and David Cole, aid her handsomely in projecting a psychological melodrama, while the apparitions are inconspicuously played by two vaguely seen performers.

The problem of translating the controversial James classic to theatrical terms was enormous. Archibald has not solved it to complete satisfaction, but he has made a good try. By giving the orphans who live in a haunted and evil English mansion in 1880 real dimensions, he had to forego the strange magic of "The Turn of the Screw," in which a number of characters are reflected in one individual's reactions to strange events. Moreover, he has built up the parts of the daft children far beyond their possibilities to hold one's interest tightly. Their games and secrets, as they commune with a dead governess and a wicked and equally dead valet, have a tendency to become monotonous.

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The production itself is stylish and sumptuous in every respect. Jo Mielziner has constructed a wonderful setting for a ghost yarn and has lighted it brilliantly. The costumes by Motley are in perfect keeping with the period and mood of the piece, and Peter Glenville has put more movement into the scenes than could possibly have been explicit in the script. And there is incidental music by Alex North which serves to underline the ghostly visitations and the sheer horror of a young woman who tries to exorcise the evil spirits hounding her small charges.

The ending remains as ambiguous as it is between the covers of a book. Only in Miss Straight's subtly modulated characterization do the final scenes achieve some burden of suspense and sense. She is remarkably adept at keeping a balance between reality and unreality. In addition, she is an extremely attractive victim for what she is not quite sure are merely hallucinations. Miss Elsom is motherly as the housekeeper and Mistress Mann is excellent as the tot sings grisly ballads and is finally saved from destruction. Cole is less plausible as the boy who is forever hiding in the garden. "The Innocents" is a fairly good thriller, which might better have been left on the printed page.

The New York Times
February 2, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

At last we have a horror play that adults can admire and enjoy. William Archibald has made it out of Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw." Renamed "The Innocents," it was acted with taste and skill at the Playhouse last evening. Poor Henry James! He loved the theatre and tried desperately to write for it, but ignominiously failed. Two years ago his "Washington Square" became "The Heiress," which was a hit in New York, London and the movies. And now his classic ghost story has become a perfectly wrought drama in a style he could thoroughly approve. None of his plays was as dramatic as these novels have turned out to be.

* * *

Especially in the case of "The Innocents," style is the basic element. If you have read "The Turn of the Screw," you know that nothing concrete happens. There is no beginning or conclusion and no substance to this shivery play of the English countryside. A governess goes to a strange country home to look after two motherless children. The housekeeper is the only other character. The governess has not been there long before she sees, first, one ghost, and then another. The whole house seems to be filled with some nameless evil and terror, and the frightened governess suspects that the children may be party to it. Apart from the demoniac details, this is about all there is to the narrative of the drama.

But Henry James told it with superb style in his original story, and Mr. Archibald has retained the baleful candor of the writing in the version composed for the stage. That would not be particularly effective if the direction, acting and scenery of the play were commonplace. For this story of phantoms is a thing of moods that have to be evoked with delicacy and grace out of the many materials of the theatre.

Under Peter Glenville's imaginative direction, the performance is a work of art. To give the story its proper tone and environment, Jo Mielziner has designed an ominous but beautiful living room which we may as well describe as a masterpiece. His lighting arrangements are masterly also. And Alex North, who wrote the score for "Death of a Salesman," has composed a witches' chorus that is pithy, practical and terrifying. Give Mr. North a theme, and he goes straight to the heart of it without any musical pretentions.

If you eliminate two soft-footed, tongue-tied actors who play the parts of the ghosts, the cast includes only four people. They are superb. Little Iris Mann plays the part of the sprite-like girl with exquisite lightness and daintiness—childish, but with a note of preternatural awareness. As her older brother, David Cole also gives a winning performance. There is one memorable scene by candlelight when both children sing innocent ballads that will probably break your heart, the voices are so soft and artless.

The two adult parts are also played to perfection. As the earnest housekeeper, Isobel Elsom acts with gravity and mounting anxiety, catching accurately the apprehensive moods of the play. As the horrified governess, Beatrice Straight plays the leading part with force, sensitivity and old-fashioned charm in a style that Henry James would have been compelled to applaud, although he despised most things he saw in the theatre. This is a good part for Miss Straight, and she has mastered it.

All the actors have the benefit of appearing in lovely costumes designed by Motley in the necromantic spirit of the drama. Everyone associated with the production has contributed to its perfection. "The Innocents" is only a ghost story after all. But it is done with taste and style in the best traditions of good theatre. Henry James would be pleased to accept it as a consolation prize for the stage career that he always wanted but could never achieve.

Daily Mirror
February 2, 1950

'The Innocents' Nebulous But Beautifully Staged

By ROBERT COLEMAN

One of the most magnificent exhibitions of stagecraft that you are likely to see this, or any, season is to be found at the Playhouse. A superlative cast, inspired direction and an evocative setting make "The Innocents" a stunning display of virtuosity.

And there's the rub. "The Innocents" is a mood, a psychological tour de force, and that doesn't seem to be enough in these demanding days. It is a somewhat nebulous play by William Archibald, based upon Henry James' decadent "The Turn of the Screw." It is a divertissement which perhaps demands too much of the average playgoer.

"The Innocents" is connected with a sensitive young governess who assumes the guidance of two highly imaginative and precocious youngsters, orphans, at an English country house in 1880. Due to the negligence of a self-centered uncle, they have been subjected to the bad influences of a couple of seamy servants.

Though both of these have died, their evil examples survive. They reappear as ghosts, but when you have left the theatre there is still the question of whether they were literal ghosts or figments of the mind. That you will have to determine for yourself.

The governess sends the girl away to safety, and remains behind with the boy to dispel, once and for all, the delusions and the memories that have corrupted him. And that is a scene to make you sit forward on the edge of your seat.

Beatrice Straight gives an immensely moving and hypnotic performance as the governess. Isobel Elsom is excellent as a sympathetic and frightened housekeeper. And there are two astonishingly brilliant performances by Iris Mann and David Cole, as the children.

According to a Playbill note, young Miss Mann "received her first encouragement as a kindergarden Duse with the receipt of a John Golden award for acting promise." John has every reason to be proud of his protegee this morning. Master Cole, at 13 a veteran of several English stage and film productions, looms as a Hamlet of the future.

It was Maurice Evans who brought Peter Glenville to our shores earlier this season to stage "The Browning Version." We trust that he will remain with us as long as has Evans, for our theatre is greatly in need of directors of his calibre.

Peter Cookson, a former actor, sponsors "The Innocents." His first flight as a producer is a notable one, though we regretfully suspect that it will not prove a profitable one.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 2, 1950

'The Innocents' Is Splendidly Cast

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is so rare for the theater to turn up with an unadulterated ghost story, that "The Innocents" is a real event. Just to be about the supernatural is not enough of course, but the new play is beautiful to watch, consistent in its peculiar scope and astonishingly acted.

The famous novel of Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw," source of the play, is notoriously ambiguous among scholars. They like to read into it a deeper truth that conflicts with the surface reality. The play has fortunately settled for a straightforward acceptance of ghosts, in the sense that people's evil influence can continue to affect the living after they die.

One of the surest ways of making a ghost story convincing is simply to avoid explanations. In "The Innocents," a governess named Miss Giddens finds herself in peculiarly isolated circumstances. She is in charge of two children, a girl about 8 and a boy 12, and is forbidden to communicate with their guardian.

Mysterious Presences.

Mysterious presences disturb her, and she finds that the figures she sees are those of her predecessor and a former butler, both dead, who once had an affair in this house, and were suspected by the housekeeper of using the children to conceal their sins.

The youngsters are wily, evasive and precocious. Certain that they see the ghosts, and are possessed by their spiritual evil, Miss Giddens tries to force them to confess to save themselves. But they are frighteningly intricate. In the end she sends the girl away, believing her young enough to be saved. When she makes the boy deny his evil mentor, the results are fatal.

Several factors contribute to this play's being remarkably effective. In the first place, the writing, the direction and the playing all combine to say, "This tale is simply so, if you must have motives and explanations, make up your own."

Convincing in Role.

The casting alone of Beatrice Straight as the governess, gives the play an added conviction of its own. Her wholesome beauty and freshness, and her clean gentle attack, make it impossible to suspect Miss Giddens of anything but the utmost sincerity in her visions of the ghost, and her efforts to save the children.

As the two wards, Iris Mann and David Cole play with an understanding that is discouraging to anyone older. They comprehend perfectly the subterfuges, the false attitudes and the condescension of the youngsters toward their elders. Both of them play with style and assurance. But what makes them fascinating is that they can project the prematurity of the characters, without relishing their own prominence as performers. Here is a pair of rarely modulated performances.

The handsome Isobel Elsom portrays the housekeeper in an intelligent and controlled reading of a not very fluctuating role.

Set Is Beautiful.

Jo Mielziner has designed one of the most beautiful sets I remember for this play. Its simple enormity dwarfs the people, as a huge staircase swings up around a curved wall, a great window reveals gloomy trees, a huge Oriental chest and a mantel dominate the moss color brocaded walls, and dim Chinese paintings brood from above.

Peter Glenville has retained a suppresed atmosphere of ominous unrest and strain throughout the play, and his direction has the sincerity that alone could make it performable. Alex North composed a score that is colorful, threatening and unreal.

Here, for anyone with the imagination to forget cynicism and accept new dimensions, is an extraordinary experience.

Journal American

February 2, 1950

Eerie and Arresting —Truly Spellbinding

By ROBERT GARLAND

In a lifetime of constant but haphazard playgoing, I do not recall a single theatre-piece which held me as spellbound as William Archibald's translation of "The Turn of the Screw" from the library to the stage. At the Playhouse, from last night on, you have as eerie and arresting an interval of professional make-believe as you are likely to attend between, say, here and the hereafter.

When, some while ago, I heard that Mr. Archibald, dancer into librettist, had a dramatization of the Henry James long short-story on his mind, I dismissed it as a fabrication of his press-agent's imagination. Although I realized that an Allan Turpin had turned his hand to it in London in 1946, it had, I knew been displayed with only more or less success in an arty theatre.

But William Archibald! He who danced the Faun to Imogene Coca's Nymph in Billy Rose's "Concert Varieties"! He who wrote the book and lyrics for Baldwin Bergersen's "Carib Song"! What would he know of "The Turn of the Screw," one of the most sinister and obscure of modern fictions? How, supposing he did know his Henry James, could he, or anyone, transfer it to Broadway? . . .

Yet Mr. Archibald has done exactly that!

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Story, Play One

William Archibald has done exactly that with chilling effectiveness plus an imposing economy of means. As far as such a thing is possible, his "The Innocents" and Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" are one. The story-teller, who always yearned to be a dramatist, could readily approve of what Mr. Archibald has achieved. I wish he were alive to see it on 48th Street!

Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper who knows more and less than she admits, is there. And Miss Giddens, the governess who walks into a situation which is out of this world and in it. And Flora and Miles, the innocent and not innocent boy and girl of the new title. And the dead man who is not dead. And the dead woman who is not dead. And the horrible hold they have on the haunted children.

Since last Summer, when I saw the theatre piece at Pennsylvania's Mountain home with Leueen MacGrath (pronounced "Lou-ween McGra" according to the programs) in the role now occupied by Beatrice Straight (pronounced "Beatrice Straight" as far as I know) Mr. Archibald has clarified the sinister situation between Miles and the dead-but-not-dead Peter. It makes an eerie play more arresting. . . .

And an arresting play more eerie!

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A Cast of Casts

Peter Cookson, actor turned producer, gives "The Innocents" a flawless production. The cast, from Beatrice Straight, his wife, to Ella Playwin, as the apparition, is as Henry Jamesian as wished for. Peter Glenville directs with uncanny rightness. And Jo Mielziner sets it with uncanny correctness. And Alex North's music adds to the overall effectiveness of a notable occasion.

Miss Straight, who came into her own in the Ruth and Augustus Goetz dramatization of Henry James' "Washington Square" by way of Emily Dickinson in "Eastward in Eden," is little short of superb as the distracted Miss Giddens. Here, she fulfills all past promises by a memorable performance. When she took over in "The Heiress," Jed Harris told me she would.

As for Iris Mann and David Cole as Flora and Miles, the innocent and not innocent children, they are of an excellence incredible. Theirs are no cute and prattlesome parts, but long and difficult impersonations projected by little Miss Mann and larger Master Cole with adult assurance. Isobel Elsom, as the housekeeping Mrs. Grose, and Andrew Duggan and Ella Playwin, as unblithe spirits, complete a cast of casts . . .

Yes, "The Innocents" is truly spellbinding!

"Mr. Barry's Etchings"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 1, 1950

Lee Tracy Dynamic In Comedy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Last night's new play, "Mr. Barry's Etchings," is an ironic little comedy about a modern Robin Hood. With some good hard work it might have been a remarkably funny work, because it has an interesting and consistent central character, whose fate and salvation are unique but logical.

As it stands, the show is a mild one. There are a lot of casual laughs, one or two hefty ones, and a general impression that while nothing in particular is wrong with the play, it is not nearly as bright and sharp as you would like it to be.

Lee Tracy has an old habit of taking over any theatrical proceedings that engage his time and efforts. Here again, he does it in his dynamic and engaging way. With a manner that seems so natural, and his careless way of enjoying himself, he makes this play about an unwitting counterfeiter seem much better than it actually is.

Role of Wacky Genius.

His role is that of Jud Barry, a wacky genius, whose talents vary from exquisite etchings to the painting of signs on barns, and from the development of a black rose to the repairing of children's toys.

Purely for his own entertainment, and chiefly as a challenge to his ability, he has turned out a perfect fifty dollar bill. When politicians and grafters get in his hair, he suddenly cannot control the temptation to promote the causes of good will with his "merchandise."

Inevitably he becomes high premium prey for the government's T men, as well as for a weird crew of professional distributors of home made wampum. Eventually and inevitably he is headed for Alcatraz. Publicity ups the value of his life story for moving pictures, until it looks as if he can pay off, and try for a Presidential pardon.

Keeps Its Charm.

The play's main charm lies in the fact that Mr. Barry never loses the affection and trust of his friends and family, however criminal he may be in a technical way. Tracy maintains this emotional value from curtain to curtain, without playing for obvious sympathy. He simply remains a charming genius who finds life too interesting to think much about money or law.

Vicki Cummings is featured as the lady head of a counterfeit ring, and she offers a mannered travesty of a comic strip moll. Scott McKay is pleasant enough in the shapeless role of the T man.

Ruth Hammond keeps things rolling as Mr. Barry's sister who deliriously stands by him in any weather, and Gaye Jordan is most attractive as her daughter.

"Mr. Barry's Etchings" is not too distantly related to many a serial in popular women's magazines. It is never going to set the world on fire, but it can keep warm anybody who wants a couple of hours of light hearted distraction with no demand to concentrate or worry.

"MR. BARRY'S ETCHINGS"

Comedy by Walter Bullock and Daniel Archer; staged by Brock Pemberton and Margaret Perry; scenery by John Root; costumes by Margaret Pemberton; presented by Mr. Pemberton at the 48th Street Theatre, January 31, 1950. The cast:

Mrs. Taylor.....Ruth Hammond
Bud.....Michael Foley
Evelyn Taylor.....Gaye Jordan
Judson Barry.....Lee Tracy
Marvin Pritchard..Gene Blakely
Carrie Stanwich..Amy Douglass
Adolph Griswold..Frank Tweddell
Sam Jordan..William Gibberson
The Duke.....George Ives
Matt.....William Sharon
Sawbuck.....Richard Carlyle
Gabby.....Howard Whitefield
Miss Ferris...Vicki Cummings
Tom Crosby.....Scott McKay
Grover Dayton.....Dort Clark
Kenneth Plunkett..Tom Reynolds

Synopsis: Act I. Mr. Barry's studio. An afternoon in July. Act II. Scene 1. A hotel room. Late October. Scene 2. Mr. Barry's studio. A few days later. Act III. Mr. Barry's studio. An afternoon in November.

DAILY NEWS

February 1, 1950

'Mr. Barry's Etchings' Neglects to Live Up to Its Very Lively Promise

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Mr. Barry's Etchings," a comedy by Walter Bullock and Daniel Archer, is about a genial counterfeiter of $50 notes. It must have looked, on paper, like the real stuff to producer Brock Pemberton, else Mr. Pemberton would not have attempted to pass it on to the public. He passed it last evening at the 48th St. Theatre and it is my miserable duty to guess that it bounced.

There is good workmanship in "Mr. Barry's Etchings"—nice comedy playing by Lee Tracy and Vicki Cummings, some good jokes, some swift lines, a pretty ingenue named Gaye Jordan, two or three really zany ideas on the part of the authors. But somehow, to use a phrase familiar to engravers and printers, it is out of register.

Mr. Tracy plays a character who has done and can do anything. He is an artist on copper plate and has made fine etchings of French cathedrals. He is equally good at mending toys for neighborhood children. As an exercise in skill, like tying trout flies, he has made a couple of hundred thousand dollars' worth of the U. S. $50 bill. The work is so well done that the only difference between Mr. Tracy's product and the official stuff is that in the counterfeit President U. S. Grant looks pleasant.

Not Fast Enough.

So a number of people descend upon the modest Tracy. Miss Cummings, head of a counterfeiting gang, wants his services. Scott McKay, a U. S. T-man, wants to take his money out of circulation—and Mr. Tracy out of circulation, too.

Maybe it all could be fast, furious and funny, just the way "Three Men on a Horse" was when horse-track rascals kidnaped Erwin, the greeting-card poet whose hunches never failed. But at the 48th St. Theatre last evening "Mr. Barry's Etchings" was never fast or furious, and only rarely did it perk up and get funny.

I think the shortcomings of the comedy are two. First, since it is frankly fanciful, it should be played so quickly that the audience has no chance to catch up with it and give it a realistic appraisal. It was not so played last evening by a hesitant cast. Even Mr. Tracy lacked drive. Second, the authors got their hero into a satisfactorily tough jam by having him arrested and confronting him with three to 15 years at Alcatraz. Then their invention failed, and the only way they could get him out of this jam was to win him a pardon from President H. S. Truman. This is farther than any authors should go to clear up a mess. Mr. Truman has enough to do with his own messes.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

February 1, 1950

The Robin Hood of Counterfeiters

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Society for Finding the Right Play for Lee Tracy has done a slightly better job with "Mr. Barry's Etchings," which opened at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre last night, than it did recently with "Metropole," but I'm afraid it still hasn't performed its function well enough. The new comedy by Walter Bullock and Daniel Archer has an entertaining second act and several amusing ideas, but it has grave trouble beginning and ending and is pretty thin going throughout, despite Mr. Tracy's customary guile.

This time the star is a sort of Robin Hood among counterfeiters, an odd and generous fellow who can make all kinds of artistic things, including fraudulent fifty dollar bills, showing General Grant smiling. The Mr. Barry of the title finds that such worthy causes as a veterans' hospital and a reform candidate for mayor are in need of money, and, although he had made the bills simply for fun, he decides to use them for the good of his fellow man.

Second Act

Almost everything that is worth watching takes place in the second act, when a gang of non-idealistic counterfeiters, led by a lady called Fifty Ferris, who is allergic to paper money, moves in on Mr. Barry, posing as reporters from Life Magazine. Since there are also some treasury agents present, who are likewise pretending to be from Mr. Luce's national institution, there is some confusion, and Mr Barry, imitating a movie gangster, holds up the lady with a toy machine gun he was making for a neighborhood child.

The practical counterfeiters are rather comic, and so is Mr. Barry's foiling of the band, but, as the second act is an oasis surrounded by barrenness, "Mr. Barry's Etchings" offers too thin an evening for comfort. In the last act, a big motion picture man, who has the popcorn concession at the movie houses, is introduced to bring about a happy ending—Harry Truman also has something to do with that happy ending—and it is decided to make a film to be called "The Barry Story," which may be a practical idea at that.

Radical Propaganda?

Since Brock Pemberton, the play's producer, is known as a solid and conservative man, deeply suspicious of radical ideas, there is cause for surprise in the first two acts when the comedy sneers at the industrious and successful business men and applauds reformers and other social subversives. But the final act is, you will be relieved to know, all on the side of law and order, and there is little danger of the work being considered Communist propaganda.

It is, of course, always a pleasure to watch Mr. Tracy in action, but everything shouldn't be left to his nervous energy and physical ingenuity. Vicki Cummings is excellent as the lady counterfeiter, and there is helpful work by Scott McKay, Ruth Hammond and other industrious players. The only trouble is that "Mr. Barry's Etching" is such an emaciated comedy that a fine star and a few good episodes cannot save it.

Journal American
February 1, 1950

Funny, But It Never Pulls Itself Together

By ROBERT GARLAND

For his third Broadway comeback in a twelvemonth, Lee Tracy brings skill and personality to "Mr. Barry's Etchings" by Walter Bullock and Daniel Archer. At the 48th Street, it is what used to be a "farce-comedy" and Brock Pemberton's second offering of the present season.

In the palmly days before "A Knockout or Nothing" became the showshop's slogan, this cheerful theatre-piece would have easily made itself a run. No masterwork of humor or imagination, its laughs are not infrequent and the story it tells is, to write the truth about it, unhackneyed.

Mr. Pemberton, as the farce-comedy's director - producer, gives Mr. Tracy, as the farce-comedy's star, a becoming surrounding company in which Vicki Cummings and Scott McKay are featured and Ruth Hammond, who appeared more often in "Life with Father" than any other human being, should be.

John Root, his second set slipping snugly into his first, has backgrounded it quite nicely. Margaret Pemberton, who knows a fitting costume when she oversees it, has attended to the clothing. Brock Pemberton, directing with Margaret Perry, has gagged it up without pulling it together. And yet—

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The Mr. Barry of the title is—eccentric! Retiring from the world to what looks and sounds like Connecticut, he loves nothing more than to putter around his studio. By way of being the local Mr. Fix-It, the kids bring him their toys and he, at his own expense, remakes them as good as new.

Better, even! This, however, does not fill up his time. So he goes in for etching. When you meet him on-stage in 48th Street, he is well past what he calls his "cathedral period." He is now concerned with portraits of the famous. Small oval portraits of General U. S. Grant, for instance!

Likenesses of the justly celebrated occupant of the mausoleum on Riverside Drive as they are rumored to appear on fifty-dollar bills. He is good at these. But, at the same time, he believes that the Treasury Department should cheer the General up rather than have him look so pre-Richmond-like and solemn.

Rugged individualist that Mr. Barry is, he runs up a slew of fifty-dollar bills of his own smiling-General design and manufacture. From the basement of his studio he puts them in circulation. Always helpfully! To right-minded would-be mayors. To hospitals fighting poliomyelitis. To veterans' future housing. And yet—

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And yet neither Brock Pemberton's production of, nor his performers in the Walter Bullock-Daniel Archer farce-comedy manages to be as entertaining as they hope for. "Mr. Barry's Etchings" jumps on its ha-ha horse and rides off in all directions. Especially in what should be the homestretch.

Lee Tracy is in top form as the Connecticut counterfeiter—if Mr. Pemberton will excuse the awkward word! As Hollywood sinks into his past, Mr. Tracy indulges less in overplaying. In "Mr Barry's Etchings" he is quieter than he was in "Metropole," in which he was quieter than he was in "The Traitor."

Whenever given half-a-chance, Vicki Cummings displays her high ability as a low comedienne. Ruth Hammond, once a Cousin Cora, is now a Mrs. Taylor and pleasant to have around again. Scott McKay, co-featured with Miss Cummings, is a likely enough escapist from radio's Cheese Theatre.

"Mr. Barry's Etchings" does well enough at the beginning. What it does not do thereafter is pull itself together, improve as it goes along and wind up as a brand new Broadway must-see. A Brock Pemberton production, it is better than "Love Me Long" but not within a rabbit's run of "Harvey."